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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000419

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GR](#) [BAKOYANNIS](#)

SUBJECT: NEW GREEK FOREIGN MINISTER AN OLD FRIEND OF AMERICA

Classified By: Ambassador Charles P. Ries. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

1. (U) SUMMARY: As has been anticipated for weeks, Prime Minister Karamanlis announced changes to his Cabinet February 14, including the replacement of Foreign Minister Petros Molyviatis with Athens Mayor Dora Bakoyianni. This move does not come as a surprise and will not alter the excellent relations the Embassy now enjoys with the Foreign Ministry. We expect Molyviatis will continue to advise the Prime Minister, in an unofficial capacity. Draft congratulatory messages contained in paras 5 and 6. Other Cabinet changes reported septel. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Theodora (Dora) Bakoyianni is perhaps the most popular mayor of Athens since the Golden Age of Pericles. The first woman to serve as Mayor, Mrs. Bakoyianni was elected in 2002 with the biggest majority in the city's history, and she routinely tops popularity polls for New Democracy (ND) politicians. Politically, Mrs. Bakoyianni has espoused moderate positions when she has commented on foreign policy issues, and has been particularly forceful on terrorism. On terrorism, of course, her family story gives her special reasons to be firm. Her first husband was assassinated by the domestic terrorist organization "17 November" (17N) in 1989. She gave strong support to the U.S. after the September 11 attacks (as did the whole ND leadership, in contrast to the then-ruling socialist (PASOK) party). Dora has been outspokenly opposed to leniency for convicted 17N terrorists and in favor of keeping the 17N investigatory file open. On regional issues, Mrs. Bakoyianni favors Greek-Turkish rapprochement and Turkey's European (EU) path, and she publicly supported the Annan Plan for Cyprus in 2004.

3. (C) Meanwhile, in the announcement of the Cabinet reshuffle, Karamanlis thanked Molyviatis for his 50 years of public service. We do not believe, however, that the 78-year old Molyviatis is through with government service. While there was no announcement today of a new job for Molyviatis as Minister of State, this could still occur. At the least, Molyviatis will continue to function unofficially as the PM's Elder Statesman on foreign policy issues.

4. (C) Dora Bakoyianni is not only the natural successor to Molyviatis at the MFA, she is widely seen by the Greek elite as Prime Minister Karamanlis's leading possible successor and rival to lead the ND party. Bakoyianni owes her political career to her father (Constantinos Mitsotakis) who chaired ND for nine years, in addition to serving as Prime Minister. She served in her father's cabinet both as Deputy Minister to the PM (effectively "gatekeeper" to Mitsotakis) and as Culture Minister. Following ND's electoral defeat in 1993, the party split into two major factions -- one led by Dora's father, the other by current PM Costas Karamanlis. For this reason, Bakoyianni has been an outsider in the Karamanlis camp, and Karamanlis has been reluctant to give his chief competition such a high-profile job.

5. (C) It was undoubtably not an easy decision for Karamanlis to put Bakoyianni in such a high-profile post and thereby possibly anoint her as a "Gordon-Brown-like" successor in waiting. Providing they can manage the personal and political rivalries, however, bringing Bakoyianni into the government should help Karamanlis. Photogenic and forceful, Bakoyianni's energy and desire to shape events will help Greece cut a wider swath in the Balkans, in Brussels and internationally. The attention to Bakoyianni will also tend to diminish any political benefit PASOK leader George Papandreou would get from his new international stage as President of Socialist International.

6. (C) We expect Dora to get out of the blocks early, traveling to Europe and the Balkans. She will no doubt wish to visit Washington in the coming months as well. A "hands on" manager, we anticipate that Bakoyianni will move quickly to revamp the Foreign Ministry and make personnel changes. On policy, in addition to the war on terrorism, we expect Bakoyianni to take a more activist role in working on relations with Turkey and to move the Cyprus issue (where both she and her father were advocates for the Annan Plan).

7. (SBU) TEXT OF PROPOSED CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE TO INCOMING FOREIGN MINISTER BAKOYIANNI:

Dear Madame Minister:

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the "sisterhood" of Chief Diplomats, and commend you for stepping up to assume a crucial job at a critical juncture in global affairs. Greece and the United States have long been close allies, and you are taking over at a time when relations between our two countries have never been better. Our strategic partnership is evident from Afghanistan to the Balkans, where U.S. and Greek diplomats and soldiers are working side by side to bring freedom and peace to people who have long felt the lack of it.

As you prepare to take over the reins at the Foreign Ministry, I want to assure you of my willingness to work closely with you to advance security in your immediate neighborhood and around the world. I know that we will stand shoulder to shoulder in the war on terror. The United States also will work with Greece to improve relations with Turkey, including support for its EU membership perspective and to work to promote a Cyprus settlement. We also rely on Greece as a strategic partner at NATO and in the UN Security Council. As you are all too aware, we face complex challenges around the world, but together I am confident we can achieve great things.

I look forward to working with you, and meeting you soon.

Sincerely, etc.

18. (SBU) TEXT OF PROPOSED THANK YOU MESSAGE TO OUTGOING FOREIGN MINISTER MOLYVIATIS:

Dear Mr. Minister:

I wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for the excellent cooperation we have enjoyed during your tenure as Foreign Minister. Around the NATO table, I will miss your insight -- and your sense of humor -- about the business of diplomacy.

As you leave the Foreign Ministry, you should take great pride in the fact that U.S.-Greece relations are better than they have been for many years. And not only our bilateral relationship has improved under your leadership. You have been a staunch proponent of regional stability, be it in the corridors of Brussels in the run-up to the launch of EU accession negotiations with Turkey, or with leaders in Belgrade, Zagreb and Pristina, upholding our common commitment to bringing war criminals to justice and fostering a peaceful solution in Kosovo. I am very grateful for your support of Afghanistan's reconstruction and stability in Iraq, which I know have not been easy decisions for Greece to make.

Above all, I must thank you, on behalf of all Americans, for Greece's immediate and unstinting efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. I know we did not fully utilize the Greek offer, but that in no way diminishes its value to us. Greece's generous donations, from public and private coffers, aided Americans in their hour of need. There is no better measure of friendship than that.

Sincerely, etc.

END TEXT CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES

17. (U) BIO NOTE: Dora Bakoyianni was born in 1954, the eldest child of former Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis (1990-1993). The family fled Greece to escape the military dictatorship in 1968, returned in 1974. She married politician Pavlos Bakoyiannis in 1974. An outspoken member of Parliament, Pavlos Bakoyiannis was assassinated by domestic terror organization "17 November" in 1989. Bakoyianni has two children from her first marriage. She remarried in 1998 to Greek businessman Isidoros Kouvelos, although he stays out of public life. Dora studied political science and law at the University of Athens, politics and communications in Germany. She is a longstanding member of the New Democracy party. During her father's tenure as PM, Dora Bakoyianni served as Minister of Culture. In opposition politics, she served as shadow foreign/defense minister (in addition to being elected to parliament four times). Bakoyianni was picked by current PM Karamanlis in 2002 to run for Mayor of Athens. Fluent in English, French and German.

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